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ABSTRACT

To determine perceptions of school board members, teachers, and principals in rural schools about the quality of their educational programs, the type of preparation they had received in preservice programs, and the inservice opportunities available to them, responses to questionnaires from 2,028 teachers, 119 principals, and 113 school board members throughout the states of Arizona, Colorado, Kansas, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, and Wyoming were analyzed. Background data were broken down according to sex, school placement, linguistic fluency, ethnic origin, and educational attainment. More than 80% of teachers and principals and more than 65% of school board members were satisfied with selected aspects of their school program, 80% of teachers and 75% of principals had no specific preparation for service in a rural setting, and approximately 92% of teachers and 100% of principals had participated in inservice training. Inservice programs designed to upgrade rural school personnel may need to be different from those in the past. Such programs should include expanded off-campus, field-based graduate programs, rural school program models, leadership roles for rural teachers and principals in planning, directing, and presenting inservice workshops, procedures for multiple teaching activities, and increased understanding of rural cultural issues. (MM)

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Inservice Needs: Perceptions of Rural Teachers, Principals and School Board Members--A Nine State Study

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Many individuals who have written about rural education, the uniqueness of rural schools, and special needs of teachers in those schools have indicated that there is a real need for programs which specifically prepare teachers for teaching in rural schools. A number of studies (Amodeo, 1983; Charles, 1969; Edington, 1982; Muse, 1977; and others) have reported that teachers in rural schools felt that they were inadequately prepared for teaching in rural settings. It would appear, then, that teachers and administrators in rural schools would perceive a real need for inservice programs to assist them in coping with unique problems in rural schools as well as to assist them in enhancing the quality of education offered in those schools.

In reviewing the literature, this writer was struck by the absence of data to indicate what the perceptions are of professionals in rural schools regarding their current inservice needs, or even their perceptions of the quality of teaching or of the educational programs found in those schools. It is important to point out at the beginning that perceptions may or may not be closely correlated with actual fact. However, it is important to point out that perceptions held by individuals in rural schools may contribute to constant review and upgrading of the quality of educational experiences provided rural children and youth, or those perceptions could hinder constant review and upgrading of those educational experiences. It depends upon what is perceived.

One factor which appears to be a hindrance to encouraging inservice programs which might result in enhancing educational opportunities for rural youth is that "rural principals often find that patrons resist curriculum innovations and new teaching techniques. Thus it comes as no surprise that principals are frustrated when they try to placate generally conservative

school boards, who often discourage the purchase of professional assistance by those principals attempting to foster growth, development and change" (Wilson, 1977, p. 8).

Because of the writer's interest, along with that of two colleagues Drs. Amodeo and Martin, a study was undertaken in a nine-state area to determine, in part, the perceptions of school board members, teachers and principals in rural schools toward the quality of certain aspects of the educational program in those schools, the type of preparation rural school personnel had received in preservice programs, and the type of inservice opportunities which had been available to them. This study is still underway but should be completed later this spring. Target schools were those NCA member schools from the nine westernmost states in the NCA region who identified themselves as rural schools on their annual reports, plus "matching" non-NCA member rural schools recommended by state departments of education in each state. Funding for the study was received from the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, and New Mexico State University's Department of Curriculum and Instruction and the Educational Research Center. This paper will present aspects of that larger study which are directly related to perceptions of three groups (school board members, teachers, and principals) in rural schools toward inservice needs.

Background Information Regarding Respondents

Questionnaires were received from 2,028 teachers, 119 principals, and 113 school board members throughout nine states of Arizona, Colorado, Kansas, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota and Wyoming. Of the 2,028 teachers, 56.5% were women, 59.4% were teaching in NCA accredited schools, and 64.7% were in high schools (Table 1). Since there are fewer

TABLE 1: Background of Respondents

	School Board Members	Teachers	Principals
Total Respondents in Each Group	113	2028	119
Percentage of Respondents Who Were:			
Women	22.1%	56.5%	11.3%
in Elementary Schools	—	27.1%	27.0%
in Junior High/Middle Schools	—	8.2%	7.2%
in High Schools	—	64.7%	65.8%
in NCA Accredited Schools	—	59.4%	46.2%
Fluent Only in English Language	62.8%	79.9%	75.6%
Fluent in 2 or More Languages	30.1%	16.7%	6.7%
Asian	2%	1.1%	1.7%
Black	7%	1.1%	4.2%
Eastern European	13.3%	3.6%	10.9%
Hispanic	0	8.0%	8.4%
American Indian	7%	7.0%	5.0%
Western European	45%	43.4%	38.7%
Other or no response	25.7%	35.8%	31.1%

junior high or middle schools in rural areas, this would appear to be an expected response. Since there was a greater number of NCA accredited rural high schools than elementary schools in the nine states, more high schools were represented than elementary schools.

Some interesting facts related to respondents should be noted:

(1) While 56% of the respondent teachers were women, only 22% of school board members and 11% of the principals were women.

(2) More than three-fourths of the teachers and principals were fluent only in English, only 63% of the school board members were in this category.

(3) Thirty percent of the rural school board members reported being fluent in two or more languages, while less than 17% of the teachers and 7% of the principals reported being fluent in two or more languages.

(4) Ethnicity of school board members, teachers and principals tended to be European (Eastern or Western) with limited numbers belonging to other ethnic groups.

This background information may or may not have some affect on perceptions these respondents have regarding inservice needs. In reviewing this information, it would appear that: (1) few women are serving in principalships in rural schools; (2) only one out of five school board members are women; (3) principals are less likely to be fluent in two languages than are teachers and even more so than school board members; and (4) school board members, teachers and principals appear to be heavily Anglo if ethnicity and language fluency are considered as related components. It would appear that principals who design inservice programs are predominantly male, while the majority of teachers for whom inservice programs are designed are female. Would this relationship

have any impact on perceptions of inservice needs by these respondents, or not? That question is not answered in this study but it could be a factor.

Another important factor in both the determination of inservice needs and the perception of inservice needs held by respondents is the level of college education acquired by rural school personnel.

The information presented in Table 2 indicates that, of these respondents, 41.3% of the teachers, 93.9% of the principals and 18.5% of the school board members hold at least the master's degree. It is important to note that 3.7% (52) of the teachers and one principal have not completed the bachelor's degree. Further information related to educational attainment is included

TABLE 2: Highest Level Attained by Respondents

	Teachers	Principals	School Board Member
High School Diploma or less	--	--	26.5%
Some College	3.7%	0.9% (1)	26.5%
Bachelor's Degree	58.8%	6.1%	25.7%
Master's Degree	27.9%	32.5%	9.7%
Master's Plus 30	11.6%	43.0%	--
Ed.S. Degree	1.3%	9.6%	--
Doctorate	0.5%	8.8%	8.8%
Percentage Holding Master's or Higher:	41.3%	93.9%	18.5%

in Table 3 which indicates that 36.3% of these teacher respondents and 29.4% of the principal respondents are pursuing work beyond the level they've already achieved. It is of particular note that 3% of the teachers and 18.5% of the principals are pursuing the Ed.S. or doctoral degrees. Ten teachers and eleven principals reported that they already hold a doctoral degree.

TABLE 3: Percentage of Teachers and Principals Working Toward Higher Educational Goals

	Teachers	Principals
Bachelor's Degree	3.0%	0.9%
Master's Degree	21.0%	3.4%
Master's plus 30	9.3%	6.7%
Ed.S. Degree	1.3%	12.6%
Doctoral Degree	1.7%	5.9%
Percentage Working Toward Higher Educational Goals:	36.3%	29.4%
Percentage Working Toward Ed.S. or Doctorate	3.0%	18.5%

The information reported in Tables 2 and 3 may have a director relationship on perceptions these respondents hold in regard to pre-service and inservice education which could assist them in enhancing learning opportunities for rural children and youth. It may be that colleges and universities are more easily accessible in terms of attaining higher levels of education than

was true in the past. The desire to obtain higher edgrees, and the attainment of higher degrees, may tend to "blunt" the perception of need for inservice education. Or, such attainment could sensitize those individuals to even greater need for appropriate inservice education focused on rural children and youth.

In reviewing this background information concerning the respondents, the following conclusions seem to be most important: (1) although more than half the teacher respondents were women, only one in nine of the principals respondents were women; (2) teachers and principals in rural schools are less likely to be fluent in a language other than English than is the case with school board members; (3) rural school principals have acquired graduate degrees to a much greater extent than have teachers in rural schools; (4) more than 40% of the teacher respondents hold the master's or higher degree, yet 3.7% have not acquired the bachelor's degree; and (5) a third of the teacher and principal respondents are pursuing further college work.

Satisfaction With Various Aspects of Their Rural Educational Settings

Before considering perceptions specifically related to their pre-service and inservice programs, it would seem appropriate that we consider the degree of satisfaction these respondents expressed with certain aspects of the educational program or various factors related closely to that program. The perceptions of "quality" found in the program could very well have impact on attitudes toward both the quality of pre-service and inservice programs and the very need for such programs. Although many other aspects are considered in the larger study, only the few which appear to be especially applicable are reported here. Table 4 presents information regarding the percentages of each group which expressed satisfaction with selected aspects of the program in their schools.

TABLE 4: Percentage of Respondents Indicating Satisfaction With Selected Aspects of Their School Program

Reported Satisfaction With:	Respondents		
	Teachers	Principals	School Board Members
Diagnosis of student abilities	81.6%	84.8%	67.3%
Use of comprehensive student reporting systems to parents	81.6%	80.5%	73.1%
Teacher understanding of rural children and youth	90.7%	92.9%	86.0%
School program evaluation	82.6%	87.6%	71.2%
Competence of teachers in working with rural children and youth	91.6%	94.7%	86.5%
Teacher certification in terms of rural settings	92.0%	89.9%	89.9%
Preparation of teachers	91.7%	91.3%	83.4%
The general school curriculum	89.6%	92.6%	81.3%
Mean Satisfaction on Above	87.7%	89.3%	79.8%

The literature provides no similar information so it is difficult to determine whether this degree of satisfaction on these specific items could be expected from past studies or not. What appears to be apparent is that the three groups of respondents tend to be quite satisfied with these particular aspects of the school programs in their rural schools. School board members are less satisfied than are teachers and principals, but not to what seems to be a great degree except in regard to "diagnosis of student abilities."

School board members tended to indicate somewhat less satisfaction in the areas of "use of comprehensive student reporting systems to parents," "school program evaluation," "general school curriculum," and "preparation of teachers." Even then, more than 70% of the school board members expressed satisfaction with each of these areas and more than 83% of them were satisfied with the preparation of teachers. Ninety percent or more of each group expressed satisfaction with "teacher certification in terms of rural settings." There appears to be little indication from these perceptions that there is extensive need for inservice education in rural settings.

Teacher assignments is another area in which little data is available which indicate the number of separate preparations or separate disciplines assigned each teacher. Various authors indicate teachers in rural schools carry more varied assignments than do teachers in urban schools, but the degree to which they do isn't available. Table 5 presents type of classroom organization in which these elementary teacher respondents are teaching and the number of preparations required of and number of separate disciplines taught by secondary teacher respondents. The majority (65%) of these elementary teacher respondents teach in self-contained classrooms while 34.6% teach in departmentalized classrooms. About 45% of these elementary teachers teach two or more grade levels. The secondary teacher respondents reported that they carried varied teaching assignments. As indicated in Table 5, 43% of these secondary teacher respondents have four or more preparations and more than 9% teach three or more separate disciplines. More than a third teach two or more disciplines. Add these assignments to such responsibilities as sponsorship of clubs, coaching, newspaper and yearbook, chaperoning, ticket selling and other fundraising activities and it is readily apparent

TABLE 5: Teaching Assignments Reported by Elementary and Secondary Teachers in Rural Schools

Nature of Assignment	Percentage Reporting
Elementary Teachers:	
Self-Contained Classrooms	65.0%
Departmentalized Classrooms	34.6%
Teaching Two Grade Levels	21.7%
Teaching Three or More Grade Levels	22.8%
Secondary Teachers:	
Number of Teaching Preparations	
One	15.3%
Two	19.2%
Three	21.9%
Four	19.4%
Five	14.8%
Six	6.7%
Seven	2.0%
Number of Separate Disciplines Taught	
One	65.5%
Two	24.6%
Three	6.1%
Four	2.0%
Five	1.0%

that teaching assignments and other responsibilities assumed by teachers in rural schools are quite diverse. These factors might provide some basics for inservice planning and pre-service preparation programs.

Preparation of Principals and Teacher Respondents for Rural Settings

Principals and teachers were asked to indicate ways in which they had received preparation for teaching and what they believed was the most appropriate approach for preparing teachers for schools in a rural setting. As indicated in Table 6, three-fourths of the principals and over 80% of the teachers indicated that they had had no specific preparation for teaching in a rural setting. What's more, more than 20% of both principals and teachers believe no specific preparation for teaching in rural schools is needed. With the exception of "attending conferences," both teachers and principals responded that each of the ways listed in Table 6 were appropriate ways of preparing teachers for teaching in a rural setting than had been the case in their own preparation. On the basis of these responses, it would appear that teachers and principals in rural schools are quite divided on what might be the most appropriate preparation for teaching in a rural setting, or if any special preparation is needed at all. The large percentage of "no response" may be an indication of this lack of agreement or any real commitment to a need for any special preparation. In interpreting Table 6, it is important to note that respondents indicated the type of preparation they had had prior to beginning teaching in a rural school. This factor would greatly decrease responses which indicated "inservice workshops."

Participation in Inservice Programs

Respondents were asked to indicate the type of inservice programs they had participated in within the preceding five year period. A total of 1,855

TABLE 6: Preparation for Teaching in a Rural Setting

	Percent of Respondents Indicating Ways in Which They Had Been Prepared		Percent of Respondents Indicating Most Appropriate Approach for Preparing Teachers	
	Teachers	Principals	Teachers	Principals
Specific courses designed for teaching in rural schools	2.0%	0.%	5.0%	5.1%
Specific content related to rural schools offered within regular courses	8.5%	4.3%	14.9%	12.8%
A program designed for teaching in a rural setting	2.4%	1.7%	10.9%	18.8%
Inservice workshops	3.8%	2.6%	13.9%	13.7%
Attending conferences	2.8%	3.4%	1.6%	1.0%
No specific preparation	80.4%	75.0%	23.5%	21.4%
No response	0%	13.0%	30.0%	27.2%

(91.5%) teacher respondents and all of the principals indicated that they had participated in some type of inservice program during that period of time. Table 7 indicates the topics of workshops and percentage of teachers and principals who reported attending workshops on each topic.

TABLE 7: Inservice Workshops Attended

Topic	Percentage Attending	
	Teachers	Principals
Special Education	47.5%	58%
Title (or Chapter) Programs	24.5%	46%
Educational Technology	23.5%	52%
Subject Area	59.0%	42%
Curriculum	38.0%	70%
Classroom Management/Discipline	47.5%	58%
Career and Vocational Education	23.0%	24%
Materials Preparation	24.0%	--
Legal/Professional Aspects of Teaching/ Administration	28.5%	48%
School Organization and Administration	--	58%
Other		
Stress and Burnout	3.0%	2.0%
Cultural Awareness (or related areas)	3.5%	4.0%
First Aid	3.0%	--
Child Abuse	1.5%	--
Drugs and Alcohol	1.0%	--

If this data is representative of teachers and principals in rural settings, it appears that inservice programs are quite diverse, with no one topic or focus being the predominate one. It is important to note that a higher percentage of teachers (59%) had attended inservice programs which tended to stress non-cognitive areas. Here again, this writer has no comparable data in schools other than rural to make any comparisons.

It was interesting to note that less than 8% of these respondents, either principals or teachers, indicated that they had assumed the role of presenter, discussant, moderator, or consultant in the inservice programs attended. The study did not obtain information regarding the agencies or individuals who had served in these roles. Personnel who have these roles in inservice programs for rural school personnel could likely come from county and other intermediate school districts, from larger school districts, and colleges and universities. On the basis of this data, it would appear that teachers and principals in rural schools have minimum input into and are given limited roles in carrying out inservice programs.

Summary of Findings

To this point, the writer has attempted to present information obtained through a survey of teachers, principals and school board members from rural schools throughout a nine-state area which might provide guidance for determining inservice needs in such schools. An analysis of this data can provide implications for determining inservice needs. The primary conclusions which can be drawn from the survey are:

1. Although more than half the teachers responding to the survey were women, only one out of nine principals were women. It

appears that women either are not seeking leadership positions in rural schools or are not selected for those positions.

2. Limited data is available at this point in the study regarding whether or not teachers and principals come from ethnic backgrounds similar to those of their students. What is apparent is that both teachers and principals were predominantly Anglo or white and fluent only in English, while school board members tended to be more likely of another ethnic group and to be fluent in a language other than English.
3. Principals have a significantly higher level of education than do teachers in these rural schools. Nearly 94% of the prinicipals and more than 41% of the teachers held at least the master's degree. Three percent of the teachers and 18.5% of the principals are currently pursuing the Ed.S. or doctoral degrees. More than one-third of the teachers and about 30% of the prinicipals are pursuing formal coursework beyond the level they've already achieved. Of particular note was that more than 3% of the teachers do not currently hold the bachelor's degree.
4. Both teachers and principals indicated a high degree of satisfaction with selected aspects of programs in their schools. School board members tended to be somewhat less satisfied, but still indicated what is believed to be a high degree of satisfaction with programs offered in rural schools in their districts.
5. Assignments given teachers include several different preparations with 43% of the secondary teachers having four or more preparations and 23.5% having five or more preparations. A third of these secondary teachers are teaching two ore more disciplines with 9%

teaching three or more disciplines. More than two-thirds of the elementary teachers are assigned to self-contained classrooms with 21.7% teaching two grade levels and nearly 23% teaching three or more grade levels.

6. More than 80% of these teachers and 75% of these principals indicated that their preparation programs included no specific preparation for teaching in a rural setting. More than 20% of both groups indicated that they believed no specific preparation is needed to teach in a rural school setting. Little support was given for programs specifically designed for teaching in a rural setting.

7. More than 90% of the teacher respondents and all the principals indicated that they had participated in inservice programs during the past five years. Involvement in these inservice programs had been primarily as an observer or participant rather than in a leadership role. Most common inservice topics reported by teachers were related to subject areas followed by special education, classroom management/discipline, and curriculum in that order. The most common inservice programs attended by principals were related to curriculum, special education, classroom management/discipline, educational technology, legal/professional aspects of administration, Title (or Chapter) programs, and subject areas. It appears that limited attention was given cultural characteristics of rural or minority children or dealing with the affective domain.

Implications to Inservice Programs for Rural Personnel

In reviewing the literature on rural schools, it would appear that teachers desire special preparation, both through pre-service and inservice programs

for enhancing their efforts in rural school settings. On the basis of the findings in this study, it would appear that that is not necessarily the case. It appears that teachers, principals and school board members are quite satisfied with such areas as the curriculum currently offered, with efforts to evaluate school programs, with teacher understanding of rural and youth, with teacher competency in working with rural children and youth, with the preparation of teachers, and with teacher certification in terms of rural settings.

In view of the findings, the following implications seem appropriate for designing inservice programs for rural school personnel:

1. College and universities should expand efforts in offering off-campus field based graduate programs designed to serve the needs of teachers and principals in rural settings. The primary justification of this recommendation is based on the fact that many personnel in rural schools are pursuing higher degrees.
2. Leadership seminars or workshops should be offered to encourage and prepare women and minorities for assuming leadership roles in rural schools.
3. Inservice programs should include models of excellent rural school programs against which teachers and principals could evaluate programs in their own schools. Such inservice programs might involve field trips to observe first-hand rural programs of excellence, video tapes of those programs or even teacher exchanges to provide greater understanding of the level of excellence which can be achieved in rural schools.
4. Teachers and principals should be given a greater leadership role in planning, directing, and presenting in inservice workshops and

seminars. Persons who are presently providing quality education for rural children and youth in the rural schools should have a prominent part in educating their peers.

5. Both pre-service and inservice programs could well include efficient and effective procedures for delivering quality education to rural children and youth while teaching multi-grade level classrooms, having four or more preparations, teaching three or more separate disciplines, and handling a number of duties outside the regular classroom.

6. Attention might well be given to increasing understanding of rural children and youth, culture of rural society, culture of minorities, and other topics which fall primarily in the affective domain. Perceptions of these respondents did not indicate a need for inservice programs of this nature, but neither was there evidence that these rural school personnel has any exposure through their pre-service or inservice education programs. In the opinion of the writer, teachers and principals in rural schools may not have acquired sufficient understanding of the unique needs of these children and youth.

In conclusion, it would appear that teachers and principals in rural schools may not be as desirous of inservice programs targeted on meeting the needs of rural children and youth as one would believe from the literature. At least, they do not seem to perceive any great needs or any great shortcomings in meeting these needs. Have times changed in the past few years to the point that most teachers and principals in rural schools are more competent, are better prepared to meet the unique needs of these special

learners? Are inservice programs meeting their unique needs more than was true in the past? Or are they primarily interested in achieving higher degrees, regardless of their focus, to gain higher salaries and to gain greater mobility out of the rural setting? These questions are not answered in this study. What is apparent from this current work is that inservice programs designed to continue to upgrade the quality of education provided personnel in rural schools may need to be somewhat different from those in the past and may need to go beyond the perceived need of those personnel.

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